Unit .14

Session .02

An Unfaithful People Receive Love

Scripture

Hosea 2:16-23; 3:1-5; 14:1-4

16 In that day—this is the Lord's declaration—you will call me, "My husband," and no longer call me, "My Baal." **17** For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth; they will no longer be remembered by their names.**18** On that day I will make a covenant for them with the wild animals, the birds of the sky, and the creatures that crawl on the ground. I will shatter bow, sword, and weapons of war in the land and will enable the people to rest securely. **19** I will take you to be my wife forever. I will take you to be my wife in righteousness, justice, love, and compassion. **20** I will take you to be my wife in faithfulness, and you will know the Lord. **21** On that day I will respond—this is the Lord's declaration. I will respond to the sky, and it will respond to the earth. **22** The earth will respond to the grain, the new wine, and the fresh oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. **23** I will sow her in the land for myself, and I will have compassion on Lo-ruhamah; I will say to Lo-ammi: You are my people, and he will say, "You are my God."... **1** Then the Lord said to me, "Go again; show love to a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, just as the Lord loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes." **2** So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and five bushels of barley. **3** I said to her, "You are to live with me many days. You must not be promiscuous or belong to any man, and I will act the same way toward you." **4** For the Israelites must live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. **5** Afterward, the people of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come with awe to the Lord and to his goodness in the last days. ... **1** Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. **2** Take words of repentance with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: "Forgive all our iniquity and accept what is good, so that we may repay you with praise from our lips. **3** Assyria will not save us, we will not ride on horses, and we will no longer proclaim, 'Our gods!' to the work of our hands. For the fatherless receives compassion in you."**4** I will heal their apostasy; I will freely love them, for my anger will have turned from him.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God faithfully pursues His people even when they are unfaithful.

Option 1

Direct your students to get into groups of two or three. Give each group a sheet of paper and a writing utensil. At the top of their sheet, half the groups should write "Ideal Servant." The other half of the groups should write "Ideal Spouse" at the top of theirs. The students should now spend a few moments coming up with lists of characteristics that ideal person should have. After a few minutes, have students share what they wrote for each. Note the differences between the ideal servant and the ideal spouse. Ask the students which they would rather have: an ideal spouse or an ideal servant? Which do they think God would rather have? If they had to choose between an ideal servant and an unfaithful spouse, which would they pick? Which do they think God would pick? Introduce the lesson by saying that God pursues an unfaithful people by His own grace, as we'll see in the story of Hosea and Gomer.

Option 2

Tell your students that they are to imagine they've been hired as consultants by several major Hollywood studios. Romance movies have not done as well at the box office lately, and they want your students' help. They've tasked your students with coming up with pitches (short ideas for stories) to offer to the studios' screenwriters. They want fresh stories that will really capture audiences and bring some profitability back to the genre. Students can work solo or in small groups; give them a few minutes to come up with some ideas, and then have them share them. See what good ideas they come up with and if any of them are remotely close to the story of Hosea and Gomer. Once students have shared all their ideas, you can have them vote on the top three they want to send off the "studio." Ask them if they think it would be good to include one more idea that "you" have come up with: the story of a man who pursues his unfaithful, former-prostitute spouse. See if they think it'd be a good idea or not. Tell them this story is just what we'll see in Hosea and Gomer, and how God loves His people.

TEACHING PLAN

God's prophets, in the Old Testament, are His mouthpieces. They stood before the people and spoke with heavenly authority saying, "Thus says the Lord." Typically, the messages of prophets involved asking the people of God to repent. In the case of Hosea, the prophetic role involved more than speaking. God's plan for this prophet involved a walking, talking, breathing kind of message.

Read Hosea 2:16-23.

The Lord called Hosea to act out through his life and marriage a picture of God and Israel. Hosea sought out Gomer, a woman of promiscuity, and married her, made his home with her, and bore children with her. Of all the actions that God could have called Hosea to do, He wanted to reveal to Israel the intimate relationship that He desired with her. Gomer was not sought out to be a maid, a personal assistant, or simply a companion. Hosea made her his wife. She wasn't brought into Hosea's home solely to serve and be tolerated, but to be loved, known, and cherished. God wanted Israel to see—through Hosea's marriage to Gomer—that He didn't just call them to be His people because He wanted servants that obeyed out of duty but more of a bride who would draw near to Him.

- **If Hosea's pursuit of an unfaithful Gomer is a picture of God's pursuit of us, what does this say about His character, especially in light of our unfaithfulness?**

God commanded Hosea to pursue Gomer, his wife, who left him to turn to a life of adultery. To prepare Hosea for this call, the Lord told him more about His love for His people and how He loved them though they returned again and again to other lovers. God was the husband of His people, yet they continued to turn away from the covenant He made with them to go after other gods.

- **Like Gomer, what are some sins that you keep running back to in your own life?**

Read Hosea 3:1-5.

- **How do we define love based on our usage of the word in our culture? How is that different than the picture of God's love we see in Scripture?**

The Lord commanded Hosea to once again go and love Gomer and restore their marriage. Gomer had again run off to a lover, and it appears that her status had sunken very low. God commanded Hosea to go and show love to her. Love is more than a feeling of affection. If Hosea's love for Gomer was only to be measured by his feelings for her, then perhaps there would be nothing to show. But the kind of love that God has for His people that was demonstrated through Hosea is a covenant love. A love that was rooted in a promise and guaranteed by a commitment to pay whatever the cost for that love to continue. Again, God wanted Hosea's pursuit of Gomer to reflect His pursuit of Israel and the love that God had for Israel was a love that wasn't merely felt but a love that was displayed by action.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God faithfully pursues His people even when they are unfaithful.

Hosea 2

16-23. It is not that love is without emotion when it comes to God; far from it. In fact, these verses along with a host of others in both the Old and New Testaments show us the deep affection God has for His people. But God's love is much deeper than that. His love, and all true love, involves willing pursuit and necessary sacrifice for the sake of the one being loved.

It's important to see in these verses that God was the One pursuing. He was leading. He was taking. He was giving. His people were the ones responding to the love God initiated. So it is with us.

It's also important to notice in these verses that there was no time limit to the love God promised. The imagery of eternity is intertwined in this poetic treatment of the love of God: We will be His people forever. We will rest in Him securely forever. He has promised and given us love, and this promise and gift will never be revoked.

Hosea 3

1. At some point between Hosea 1 and Hosea 3, Gomer left. We don't know exactly why or when she did, or if this was the first time she left. Maybe this was her usual pattern. She would, like so many of us do in our own relationship with God, commit herself to her husband only to find the lure of the old life so strong that she went right back to it.

Activity

A famous toy company has come up with a great idea for the next big Christmas toy, and they want your students to design it. Your students can work solo or in small groups. Give each of them paper and drawing utensils. The students should design or describe a prototype for the new toy idea: the "God's People Doll (or Action Figure) Kit"! The prototype should have a "before" and "after" stage. When the buyer first purchases the kit, the "doll" should be like Gomer or like us: dirty, unappealing, apparently worthless. However, after following the instructions on the box, the final doll should be beautiful, appealing, and virtuous. What will the students put into the kit to correspond to Hosea's or God's work? For instance, they might put in an incredibly expensive price tag since God paid such a high price for us; they might include fancy clothes in which to dress the doll since Jesus gives us His righteousness, etc. Give them time to make or list their designs, and then let them share. See what kind of ideas they come up with and applaud the good ones. You might remind them to realize we all once were like these dolls in the "before" stage but will become like the "after" stage one day. You could also ask them how we ought to view and love non-Christians who are currently in the "before" stage.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 48, DDG)

God is Love

To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

TEACHING PLAN

Hosea's love for Gomer had to be shown and it was shown through his purchase of Gomer. Fifteen shekels of silver and five bushels of barley would have amounted to approximately thirty shekels of silver, the cost paid for a slave (Ex. 21:32). Hosea couldn't just grab Gomer and take her home because in her pursuit after other lovers she had fallen into slavery. The only way to get Gomer was to purchase her back. A cost must be paid to take her out of her slavery. Hosea's love for Gomer cost him something: he had to seek her out and pay her price.

- **Gomer's pursuit of sin ended in slavery. In what ways have you found sin to be a trap that enslaves rather than something that frees?**

We too were slaves when God came after us. In our pursuit of other lovers—things that we thought would satisfy and give us pleasure and meaning—we were nothing more than slaves to sin. When we were unlovely, unworthy, and in rebellion against God, He came, He sought us out, and He paid our purchase price. He came to each one of us with the promise of His gospel and told us that He had paid the price that would free us from our idolatry. But the price that He paid for us was much steeper than thirty shekels.

- **When you consider the price that God paid to purchase you back to Himself, how does that change your desire to be lured away by your temptations?**

Read Hosea 14:1-4.

God used the words that He had spoken to Hosea and the actions that Hosea carried to show Israel that they were stumbling in their sin and needed to return to Him. This reveals that the only thing that makes repentance possible in the first place is God's invitation. He invites sinners to repent and offers the promise of compassion, healing, love, and a turning from anger.

Gomer never took the initiative. Hosea sought her out. Hosea intended to marry her. Hosea found her again. Hosea purchased her. Hosea pursued. In fact, the only thing that we see Gomer do was run off, over and over again. So sad in so many ways, but at the same time, when we look how our hearts are prone to wonder and leave the God whom we love, isn't this the greatest hope that we could ever have? The hope of our covenant relationship with God staying intact and lasting forever isn't dependent upon us. If Christ Himself bears the full weight of our covenant relationship upon His shoulders, and if the everlasting nature of our relationship is dependent upon His faithfulness alone, then and only then can we truly have hope and assurance.

- **List some ways the prophet Hosea (whose name means Savior) resembles Jesus and His work.**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God faithfully pursues His people even when they are unfaithful.

Hosea 3

3. When Hosea went and purchased Gomer, restoring her as his wife, he said to her that from this point forward they were to remain faithful to one another, forsaking others. (v. 3). He desired a holy covenant with her. He wanted all of her affection; he wanted her committed to him and him alone. He promised to act the same toward her. Hosea did not make his purchase so that Gomer would be free to live and do as she pleased from then on. Neither was Hosea's intent for her to serve him for the rest of her life and pay him back out of thankfulness. It was so that she could, once again, be united to her husband and faithful to him, so that she could be his and he hers.

When God brought His people out of their slavery in Egypt, He told Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Let my people go so that they may worship me." The story of God and Israel was His rescue of them out of great slavery, not so that they could live as they pleased but so that they could finally be free to worship Him alone. He has done the same for us.

We were in slavery to sin. We were serving a harsh master whose intent for us was death. But through Jesus, God paid the price and bought us out of slavery, not so that we could be free to do as we please and attempt to rule ourselves but so that we could be united to Him in a covenant. He desires all of our affection. He wants us committed to Him and He promises to be committed to us. We have been bought with a price and for a great purpose: that we would praise our God who has set us free and joined us to Himself in a marriage covenant.

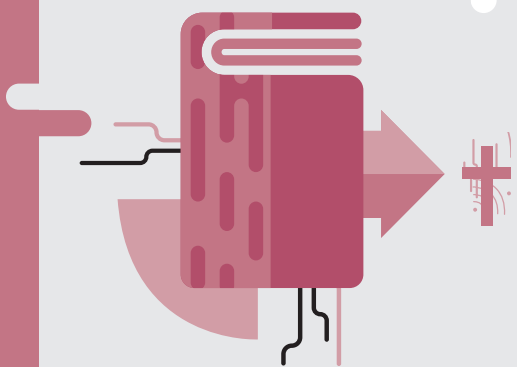
Hosea 14

This is the picture that God chose to display to Israel and to us. In this passage, He called Israel to return. He was the one who would forgive. He said He would heal the unfaithful. He would love freely. He would turn His anger away. It had to all start with God or there was no hope for Israel.

Your story is the same. God has called you out of slavery. God has forgiven you. God has healed your apostasy. God has loved you freely. God has turned His anger away from you. God has initiated everything and done all that is necessary to bring you to Himself. He offered up His only Son on the cross so that He could pursue you with all His goodness and love.

(p. 50, DDG) Christ Connection

Hosea's relationship with Gomer reminds us of God's relationship with the people of Israel and with us. Even though God's people are unfaithful and love many other things more than Him, God still loves us. It was because of God's love that He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sin and bring us back to Him.



AN UNFAITHFUL PEOPLE RECEIVE LOVE

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

LOVE – Choosing to support and care for others whether or not they deserve it.

HEAD

What action did Hosea take to show his love for Gomer?

God told Hosea to continue to go after and love Gomer when she left him and was unfaithful. Hosea had to pay to get her back since she had fallen into slavery. Hosea supported and cared for Gomer no matter what. Compare the relationship between Hosea and Gomer to God and Israel. How are they similar?

HEART

God told Hosea to continue to go after and love Gomer when she was unfaithful. How are the relationships between Hosea and Gomer & God and Israel similar?

God's love is affectionate and caring, but it is also a *choosing* love. His devoted love involves willing pursuit and necessary sacrifice for the sake of the one being loved. When we experience God's deep love, how might it change how we respond to Him and to others?

HANDS

Romans 8:38–39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

That means there is nothing you have done, should have done or that's been done to you that can keep God from loving YOU! Even when you run away or are unfaithful to God, He will run after you because He loves you and wants to be in a committed relationship with you.

Create something (a song, a poem, a piece of art, a letter, a game, a presentation, collage, etc.) to express Romans 8:38–39. Be creative. Take a picture of it to show or bring it in to share with your LifeWise class. Then, either give it to someone who needs to know they are dearly loved by God or keep it to remind you of this unshakeable truth.